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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EUN](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: BACKGROUND TO NOMINATION OF JOHANNES HAHN AS
AUSTRIA EU COMMISSIONER; BIOGRAPHY

REF: (A) VIENNA 1384 (B) VIENNA 1366

Classified By: Econ/Pol Counselor Dean Yap. Reason: 1.4(b) and (d)

[¶1.](#) (U) Summary. Johannes Hahn, Austria's EU Commissioner-designate, is a compromise candidate chosen by the Social Democrats (SPO) and People's Party (OVP) to end a damaging political fight. Hahn has had a mixed reputation as Science and Research Minister (since 2007). He has been willing to take on politically difficult tasks such as university reform, but is seldom pro-active and can appear detached. The Austrians hope he will be given the Commission's science portfolio, but fear he will be given a minor job such as the education portfolio. End Summary,

Background: A Compromise Candidate

[¶2.](#) (U) Per Ref B, over the last two weeks Chancellor Faymann and the SPO have sought to block the nomination of former OVP leader Molterer as Commissioner, as favored by the OVP. The reasons behind the SPO's sudden interest in the post (Faymann had earlier conceded the decision to the OVP) lie in intra-party and domestic politics. After Hahn's nomination, Faymann made clear his objections to Molterer in a television interview: Molterer's abrupt break-up of the previous SPO-OVP coalition in 2008 had been a breach of confidence. As important as this, however, would have been pressure from within the SPO to take a strong stance vis-a-vis the OVP after a recent string of electoral losses.

[¶3.](#) (U) During the summer Hahn's name emerged as a possible candidate for the EU, along with several others. However, after Faymann's October 16 decision to intervene in the decision and endorse sitting Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Hahn's star rose quickly as a possible compromise candidate until Oct. 27 when Faymann and SPO leader Proell reached agreement on his nomination.

Biography and Corridor Rep

[¶4.](#) (U) Hahn, 52, represents the relatively small urban and liberal wing of the OVP (advocating, for example, legal standing for same-sex partnerships), a factor which has enhanced his acceptability to the SPO. He holds a Doctorate in Philosophy, but prior to becoming an active politician, worked for a variety of business associations, including the Industrialists' Association (1985-87) and the Economic Forum for Business Leaders (1987-89), before becoming CEO of Novomatic in 2003.

[¶5.](#) (U) His political career dates back to 1980, when he became Chairman of the OVP youth organization,. He has been a member of the Vienna Municipal Council since 1996, and became Chairman of the Vienna OVP in 2005. Hahn was appointed Science Minister in the previous SPO-OVP government in 2007, and was re-appointed to the position in November [¶2008.](#)

¶6. (C) As Minister for Science and Research, with a portfolio also including university education, Hahn has been willing to take on difficult tasks, but too late, some say, to be effective. His proposals for university reform, which include re-instituting fees, have led student protesters to chant "Hahn should be plucked," a play on his name, which means "rooster." He has also made some political mis-steps, including attempting to withdraw Austrian funding from the EU's CERN project in order to free up funds for other priorities. Overall, he is seen as an intelligent, but detached and insufficiently pro-active politician. In post-nomination interviews he has come across as relaxed to the point of disinterest in his future role.
HOH